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An article a day of enduring significance, in condensed permanent booklet form

The One World of the air waves

HOBBY-HAPPY HAMS

Condensed from Woman's Day

Jack Cluett

One cold evening in Oak Park, Ill., Mrs. Ed Beane stepped out of the house to empty some trash. The door slammed shut, locking her out. She shouted and pounded but her husband didn't hear her: headphones glued to his ears, he was busy chewing the rag with an airwaves friend in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Mrs. Beane went next door to the Ashtons, intending to phone. There Walt Ashton, headphones glued to *his* ears, also happened to be in contact with Johannesburg. So Ashton simply relayed her plight 16,000 miles and, seconds later, Ed Beane was amazed to hear the clipped British accent announce: "I say, old man, your wife is locked out and freezing to death. Let her in."

Ed and Walt, amateur radio operators, are just two of 120,000 "hams" — 85,000 in the United States, 35,000 in foreign countries — who make up a closely knit clique of some of the most hobby-happy individuals in the world. While you and I spin our dials between 550 and 1600 kilocycles hunting for entertainment, the ham works patiently across his government-allocated short-wave bands transmitting the code letters "CQ," plaintive call of the lonely ham looking for a mate. Many of them have been talking to each other off and on for the past 35 years. Hundreds of small groups, made up of two to 20 hams, meet on the air at regularly scheduled hours and hold bull sessions far into the night. Although often half a world apart, they probably know more details of each other's personal lives than they would if they were next-door neighbors.

Most amateurs are equipped to send and receive by either radiotelephone (voice) or radiotelegraph (code). The difference in lan-

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guages between hams scattered around the globe is overcome by two internationally accepted codes. One is a set of 43 "Q" signals, which deal with essential technical information. QRS, for example, asks, "Shall I send more slowly?" QRM reports, "I am being interfered with." The other code is a set of abbreviations and, though based on English, is understood by hams everywhere. Thus, NM NW OT CUL VY 73 ES 88 2 UR XYL CL is official ham lingo for "No more now, old-timer; see you later; very best regards and love and kisses to your wife. I am closing my station."

Every ham refers to his equipment as a "rig," his place of operation as a "shack." A girl friend in short-wave parlance is a YL (young lady), and the wife is referred to as the XYL (ex-young lady). Earphones are "cans," a telegraph key is a "bug"; we of the general public are referred to scornfully as "BCLs" (broadcast listeners).

In the early days the ham's "shack" — housed in kitchen, cellar, attic or barn — was a veritable scrap heap of twisted wire, scraps of tinfoil, and Mason jars. Equipment in those days was makeshift at best. A ham's appetite for oatmeal was more often predicated on his desire for the round cardboard container, soon to become the vital core of a tuning coil, than on his passion for hot cereal.

But now the amateur's rig has moved into a more respectable corner of the house, where it takes up no more room than a large-size television set. The average amateur rig costs $588 — although the figure goes as low as $50 and as high as $25,000 — while average upkeep amounts to about $125 per year. Ninety-five percent of all ham transmitters are home-assembled, while practically all receiving sets are bought ready-made. Some amateurs have rigs in their cars as well.

Amateur Ken Moore was driving through Pasadena, sending out a general CQ call on his mobile rig, when he got an answer from William Hart in Glenview, Ill. "Since you're in Pasadena," Hart said, "would you mind taking a message to my sister at 65 South Orange Grove?" Moore glanced up and saw that not only was he directly in front of that address but that a girl was backing a car out of the driveway. Pulling over, he asked, "Do you happen to have a brother in Glenview, Illinois?" She did. And she spent the next half hour talking to him from Mr. Moore's car.

The ham wallpapers his shack with hundreds of "QSLs" — postal-size cards exchanged through the mails between hams who have contacted each other. Every ham's QSL is as distinctive as a woman's hat. Call letters are emblazoned across gaudy backgrounds. The amateur who operates station VR6AA on Pitcairn Island in the Pacific uses tropical leaves for his QSL.

Although there's a lot of personal chitchat — the weather, politics, the girl friend, grandma's lumbago —

the foremost topic of conversation is the never-ending exchange of technical information about such "trivia" as diodes, screen-grid amplifiers, kytoons and superinfragenerator receivers. If an amateur dreams up a new device to improve his transmitter, he spreads the news far and wide.

The latest such device is a gadget developed by Don E. Norgaard of Schenectady, N. Y. Called a harmoniker, it reduces TVI (television interference) from short-wave transmitters. Hams dislike being branded a nuisance, and although such things as electric razors, trolley cars, diathermy machines and vacuum cleaners cause more TVI than amateur transmitters, the hams won't sleep until they're given a clean bill of health.

Hams' discoveries benefit commercial operations and techniques as well; the discovery of the limitless value of short waves, including FM and TV, is just one example of the purely amateur accomplishments. And most of the technicians and engineers now engaged in commercial radio and TV have been recruits from the amateur ranks. During the war, when amateur radio was silenced, the 25,000 American hams in uniform were put to work designing military communications equipment, setting up global networks of radio navigational aids and manning radar installations. At the war's conclusion these same hams were quick to set up short-wave stations in the theaters of operations, contact fellow hams in the States and relay thousands of personal messages from homesick service men to the folks back home.

On the island of Cyprus shortly after the war S/Sgt. William "Pappy" Henderson, who was supervising an Army installation, found he lacked some essential supplies. On his short-wave transmitter he sent an urgent CQ call and was answered by station D4AFE in Wiesbaden, Germany. "Pappy" pleaded with the ham to rush his request for needed equipment to Army headquarters. D4AFE did better than that: he saw to it personally that the material was on a Cyprus-bound plane that very day. D4AFE, it so happened, was ham operator Lt. Gen. Curtis LeMay, Chief of the U. S. Air Forces in Europe.

Ham ranks include people from all walks of life. There are about 1500 women hams in the United States. Both Herbert Hoover, Jr., and Prince Abd el Moneim of Egypt are ardent hams. If you're one and want to talk with "Amos," of the famous Amos 'n' Andy comedy team, just call amateur station W6QUT.

The youngest ham on record was little Jean Hudson of Laurel, Del. Fascinated at the age of six by her daddy's amateur outfit, she mastered the International Code by the time she was eight and was soon operating her own licensed station, built for her by her father. Edward P. Kingsland, age 84, of Herkimer, N. Y., is probably the oldest living ham.

Any American citizen may be-

come a licensed operator provided he passes the Government examination. He must be able to send and receive at the rate of 13 words a minute by telegraph key, and must keep an accurate log of his station operations available at all times for Government inspectors. His power is limited by law to 1000 watts, and he may not broadcast entertainment or advertising, nor may he accept remuneration for his services. Any obscene, indecent or profane language results in immediate confiscation of his license. If the FCC doesn't catch up with infractions of these rules, brother hams soon will. They have an enviable record of self-discipline.

Watching over the radio hams as a mother cat guards her kittens is the American Radio Relay League in West Hartford, Conn. Among other services, the league operates as a clearinghouse and experimental lab to check all kinds of new and contemplated radio devices, which are then reported in its monthly publication *QST*, the hams' bible. But its most important work is its organization and maintenance of a national emergency network of carefully drilled volunteer hams who, in a communications emergency, work closely with the disaster communications service of the Red Cross.

To provide substitute links between the isolated areas and the outside world during national disasters, many amateurs have stayed at their stations for 30 and 40 hours at a stretch, without food or sleep, sending out urgent messages for clothing, medical supplies, nurses and doctors. Small wonder that the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, Forest Ranger Service and Red Cross have come to depend on them. Once during a Florida hurricane James T. Long, bedridden for several years, managed to crawl to his rig and with the able assistance of his wife — while their house threatened to collapse — handled hundreds of vital messages.

One night at Tillamook Rock, off the treacherous Oregon coast, huge seas smashed over the lighthouse, putting the light, foghorn and telephone out of commission. Using the ingenuity he had acquired as a ham, lighthouse-keeper Henry Jenkins improvised a rig with parts salvaged from a small battery-powered receiver, a couple of brass doorknob plates and a handful of wire. Then he contacted a ham on the mainland who notified shipping authorities. Thus all ships in the vicinity were warned and what might have been another tragedy of the sea was averted.

Well — 73 CUL. (Or, to us ordinary BCLs — Best regards, see you later.)

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